

BEXHILL-ON-SEA Observer



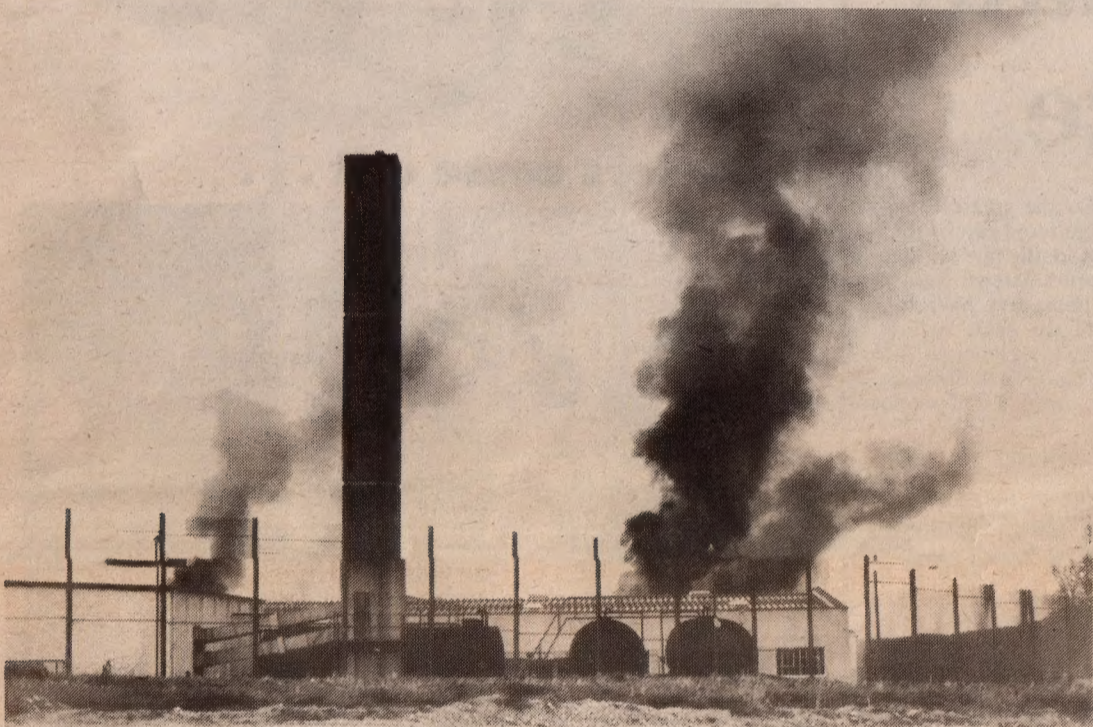
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SATURDAY, MAY 3, 1986

PRICE 10p

'We told you'



• The picture that says it all — Northeye under a pall.



Countdown to chaos

OLD Northeye hands say: "We are over 400 again. We can expect trouble."

Staff unlocked 447 on Wednesday, the day of the riot.

The population has been increased progressively to the present limit of 450. Pressure from the Home Office to prepare plans to accept have been fiercely resisted by Governor, staff and Board of Visitors.

This was done on the grounds that unrest at Northeye is closely linked to numbers.

The second significant change has been in the type of prisoner sent to Bexhill.

A close watch has been kept by the BoV which has frequently protested that men are being sent who are unsuitable for Northeye's peculiar circumstances as a converted RAF camp. Unlike a conventional prison there is no way of containing under lock and key large numbers of men if they threaten to get out of control.

A personal view by John Dowling

THE CHARACTER of Northeye Prison has changed both dramatically and dangerously since it opened, say the people who know it best.

Over the past seven years **Observer** district editor John Dowling has made a close study of the prison and its problems.

He writes: "Under the terms of the result of the public inquiry in

1967, which I covered personally, Northeye was allowed to accept 250 Category C prisoners.

"These were defined as non-violent inmates serving short-term sentences but who lacked the will-power to resist the temptation to escape from a totally open prison such as Ford.

"Since that time significant changes have occurred . . ."

Last year the Governor returned 300 men as being unsuitable for Northeye.

He has told both the BoV and the MP that every prison runs to an extent on 'consensus' — Northeye particularly so.

Board of Visitors' chairman, local magistrate Mrs Hazel Talbot, expressed

the views of the whole board when she warned the Home Office this year that somebody could die at Northeye if the Home Office did not act to provide the Governor and staff with the means of curbing violence.

Northeye prisoners have told me personally of their fears.

One said he used to wake to find needles stuck through his bedclothes into his body.

After the 'terror gangs' incidents in January when hooded gangs of prisoners armed with broom handles attacked fellow inmates, one man spoke of his real fears that someone would be killed.

The signs of impending danger have been increasing in frequency at Northeye.

An inmate died in the summer of 1982 after taking a 'cocktail' of drugs lobbed over the fence by a former inmate after a raid on a chemist's shop.

A Bexhill fire appliance was off the road for a week after inmates stoned it and its crew, called to douse the results of an arson attack in the disturbed Christmas of 1983.

The people at Northeye who know the truth, the people who have been at the sharp end of an increasingly difficult and dangerous situation are now saying to officialdom 'WE TOLD YOU SO'.

Stop press news

ON Friday morning police announced: "All Northeye inmates have now been accounted for."

A massive police search began on Wednesday night for up to 17 men thought to have scaled the 17ft wire and escaped.

Later, after a delayed roll call, the figure was amended to ten.

Police warnings had gone out via the media for the public not to approach any escapees. Some were thought to have been armed.

Prison Officers' Association national chairman Colin Steel on Thursday welcomed Home Secretary Douglas Hurd's decision to discuss negotiations.

Mr Hurd welcomed the POA decision to suspend its overtime ban.

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NORTHEYE — countdown to destruction

6.00 pm. Hooded prisoners armed with staves enter the canteen and threaten officers. Support staff go to canteen.

6.30 pm. Officers withdraw from prison as situation begins to escalate.

8.00 pm. Inmates start to come out. Second exit opened in fence to allow inmates out who are worried about passing the ringleaders. Inmates

transported to drill halls guarded by police. This continues until after 2 am.

10.30 pm. Gas containers for mobile heaters explode.

2.00 pm until dawn. 36 inmates remain inside prison. Fires continue to be lit until after midnight.

2.30 pm Charles Wardle MP arrives at the prison.

7.00 am. Governor Danny Ozanne goes in with prison officers carrying riot shields.

8.00 am. 32 inmates give themselves up. Four more rounded up in search by prison officers. Ten remain unaccounted for.

8.30 am. First fire brigade units go inside.

Bexhill-on-Sea
Observer

SATURDAY, MAY 3, 1986

Setting a dinosaur ablaze

IT IS said of the dinosaur that the greatest reason for its extinction was that if it suffered pain at the tip of its tail it was a fortnight before the fact registered on its brain and the animal took defensive action.

How many times does bureaucracy have to be beaten round the head with the facts before it reacts?

The Governor of Northeye has repeatedly warned of the growing violence in his prison and of the need for Home Office aid to curb it.

The Northeye branch of the Prison Officers' Association has done the same.

The actions of both have been fully endorsed by the prison's public "watchdog" group, the volunteer Board of Visitors.

This newspaper has repeatedly brought to the attention of the public the dangers at Northeye.

Our town MP has made it his business to investigate the facts and to put them before the Home Office.

Now the dinosaur has had its tail set alight in a night of unprecedented and disgraceful violence that will prove costly not only in material waste but in the public credibility of the prison department.

SURPRISE

It remains to be seen how quickly the dinosaur's brain will register surprise.

One thing is clear. The Home Office does not deserve the kind of dedication it received on Wednesday night from its staff.

In darkness and in danger, under a hail of stones at one time and at risk throughout from what could have proved a cataclysmic explosion, staff who had rushed in as soon as the riot broke worked as a disciplined and resourceful team.

If there is justice under the rule of the dinosaur, Chief Officer Ken Cousins deserves its gratitude for his courage in facing the howling mob when the riot first erupted.

The saddest figure in the whole sorry, unnecessary affair is the prison Governor.

In Danny Ozanne this newspaper believes the Home Office has a loyal and hard-working servant. He has worked not only for the good order and governance of his prison but for the welfare of both staff and inmates. He has also made genuine efforts to form a bridge between the prison and the community, through talks, through work by prisoners for local charities and through sporting links.

All that has been undone in one night and the fault lies not with the Governor but with those who will not heed warnings.

The police move in . . .



prisoners come out . . .



. . . and cheerfully drive away



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NORTHEYE — night of fear

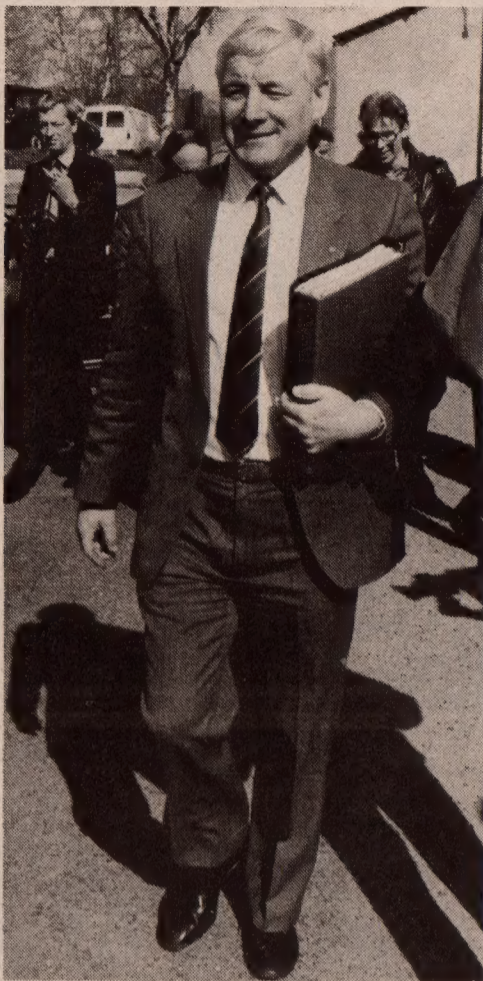
The man who used to be Governor

DANNY Ozanne greeted leaders of emergency services that night with the kind of "gallows humour" which typified the disaster. "Hello. I used to be Governor here . . ."

In dawn's light the mood had changed. The Governor told me: "There is no way the prison could continue to operate. We have no electricity, no water, no means of pumping sewage, no kitchen, no hospitals, no library and no workshops . . ."

In 25 years in the prison service Mr Ozanne says he has experienced only one more violent riot. That was the Liverpool prison riot in the Seventies when the roof was burned off an entire wing.

As a Salvationist he has worked with the prison's chaplains to make Northeye's chaplaincy centre a place where men could seek solace and help. He said: "At least they didn't burn that . . ."



A tinderbox that blew up

AN EXPLOSIVE fireball which mushroomed 70ft at the height of the Northeye riot, could symbolise the destruction not only of the prison but of a 20-year-old "temporary" expedient.

Governor Danny Ozanne, the Prison Officers' Association and the voluntary Board of Visitors had been warning the Home Office for years of such a situation.

The question now before the Home Office is — can the concept of accommodating supposedly "non-violent" Category C prisoners in semi-open conditions in converted military bases — put forward in the 1966 Mountbatten Report on prison overcrowding — survive the eruption which wrecked Northeye?

There were 447 prisoners in Northeye on Wednesday night. Because of the POA overtime ban only five men

were available to keep them in their billets, former RAF huts.

But that is only two fewer than normal.

Mr Ozanne said: "I went home for tea at 5.30. There was no sign of trouble. I was called back only a few minutes later.

"The Chief Officer, Ken Cousins, had — quite rightly in my view — ordered the evacuation of staff.

"Gangs of prisoners had broken into the kitchen and stolen knives and meat cleavers. Others had taken scalpels from the hospital."

He said: "I have three priorities in such situations:

- The protection of the public
- The protection of staff
- The protection of inmates."

Firemen and police stood by helplessly as gangs of prisoners started fires all over the camp.

As they smashed up the hospital,

workshops and many other centres, the first dazed prisoners began to crowd the gate and plead to be let out.

As darkness fell the crowd at the gate grew. Many had slipped away from the rioters afraid for their own lives.

Most carried their few possessions in pillow cases, cardboard boxes or carrier bags.

Wild shouting mixed with the crash of falling roofs and the crack of asbestos sheeting as the fires grew.

As the number of prisoners giving themselves up grew police cells over a wide area were pressed into service.

When these were filled, the Down Drill Hall and the Territorial Army drill halls at Bulverhythe and Eastbourne were used.

Part of the perimeter fence was opened to let about 100 prisoners out from the top of the prison.

Turn to page 8



• A surrendering prisoner who has escaped the hell that was burning Northeye via the hole cut in the wire by police and prison officers is led away to captivity elsewhere.

Left without an office, Governor Danny Ozanne second left, used the home of one of his officers as overnight headquarters.

• The Governor holds an impromptu Press conference in the car park.





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NORTHEYE — the morning after



• Food for 450 was once prepared here. Now the kitchen is in ruins.



• Before being burned the prison hospital was systematically looted for drugs. The prisoners suffered overdoses.



• The electrical and mechanical engineering assembly workshop was Northeye's newest. The Governor who had campaigned for years for vocational training courses for prisoners had just obtained permission for its conversion as a VTC hall.

Dawn rises on a battlefield

NORTHEYE was still burning and the last riot ringleaders were being rounded up when I went round the jail with the Governor — the first Pressman into the ruins.

Dawn rose upon a battlefield.

Prison officers with riot shields were running from billet to billet in search of prisoners still in hiding.

The prison hospital and dental surgery was a blackened shell. Thousands of pills and capsules looted from the hospital crunched underfoot. Abandoned hypodermic syringes lay everywhere.

Of the big textile workshop only the outer walls and a mass of debris remained.

Only hours before, the workshop — packed with highly-inflammable man-made fibres including polypropylene — lit the night sky with flashes of orange flame topped by dense black smoke.

The electrical and mechanical assembly workshop was a wreck. It was soon to have been converted to provide Northeye's first vocational training schemes.

The engineering workshop provided the greatest threat. In it were highly-explosive

by John

oxygen and acetylene added to the debris normally been the Northeye's industrial heart.

First target of the riot was the room — known as the VTC room because of its Vocational Training Centre record — and destroyed.

Prisoners had run themselves with knives before setting the



• This was once a library.



• The chimney of the prison boilerhouse stands out against the ruins of other buildings.



• The wreck of a workshop.



• The aftermath — this was once a textile workshop where over 100 men worked producing prison shirts and holdalls and sewed mailbags and parachutes for weather balloons.



• Once this model of a schooner graced the prison library. Before the library was gutted, rioters lobbed it into the branches of a tree.

Thursday morning — a pall of smoke hangs over the prison.

Dowling

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building ablaze.

The big water tank on top of the building was sending water down through the camp in a stream, its wooden housing burnt to ashes.

The clothing store had been gutted — for the third time in Northeye history.

Hardly a book remained among the blackened debris in the library. The model schooner that had been a feature of the building hung by its rigging from the top of a tree.

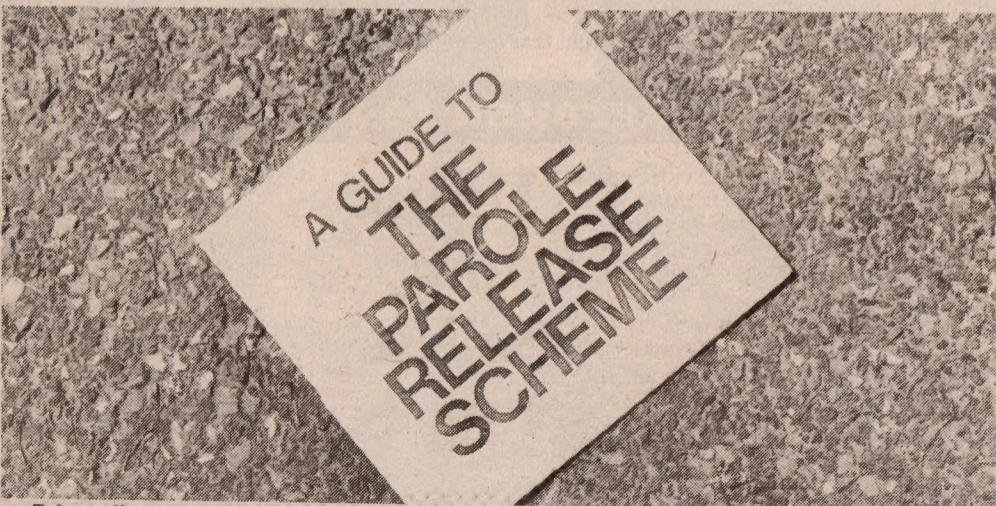
Before search parties made their sweep each officer was warned by the Governor: "If you find a body leave it alone and call in the police."

There were no bodies in the administration block which includes the Governor's office; only wanton damage.

Almost every door had been forced. In the case of the Governor's office so much force had been used that part of the wall had broken away with the door jamb. A steel filing cabinet lay on its side, its contents scattered.

The door hiding the wall safe had been wrenched open but the safe had withstood attempts to break in.

Files littered the floor. But the rioters missed the central bank of filing cabinets containing their criminal records.



• Prison literature littered the scene.



• Firemen check in the ruins of the engineering workshop as the search goes on for possible bodies.

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NORTHEYE — looking to the future

Rebuilding — and building trust

WHILE the long-term future of Northeye Prison hangs in the balance, a skeleton staff will remain on duty to deal with administration.

As the prisoners were bussed off to other prisons on Thursday afternoon, work was going on to clear away some of the debris.

In a press conference, deputy governor William Mackay said it would be a Home Office decision whether the prison would re-open or not.

But he said it would not be correct to assume that the prison would not open again.

"The prison system has been squeezing a quart into a pint pot for years, and will carry on doing so," said Mr Mackay.

After firemen had pulled down some of the unsafe buildings, a heavy high loader and an excavator

were let into the prison to begin the task of clearing up.

And with seven prisoners still unaccounted for, Mr Mackay was not ruling out the possibility that a body could still be found in the wreckage.

Home Office prison inspectors were due to visit

the remains of Northeye Prison later in the week, and the decision whether the prison will re-open will depend on how much of the prison's infrastructure remains, or can be salvaged. None of the billets had been damaged nor the gym, but 13 other buildings, including workshops, the

hospital and kitchens were gutted.

While the prison remains without inmates, the question of what to do with the staff remained.

Although Mr Mackay said he had no idea what would happen to them, prison officers' wives said their husbands would be

sent away on detached duty — perhaps as far away as Parkhurst or one of the large London prisons.

As well as the physical re-building of the prison, Mr Mackay also spoke of the re-building of trust between inmates and officers.

When asked if he thought it was right that Northeye be classified as a Category 'C' prison, he said: "I never condemn the system I work for."

Asked if he had ever felt betrayed by a prisoner, Mr Mackay said: "If I felt betrayed by every prisoner who has ever let me down I would be going to an early grave."

He said the police may be investigating the cause of the original fire, which could lead to charges of arson. But he added that he did not expect any of the prisoners to come forward and volunteer information



• Above, Detective Chief Superintendent Jack Reece, head of Sussex CID heads a squad of detectives into the prison on Thursday morning to begin the task of tracking down ringleaders among the rioters.



'Mirrors our violent society'

DEPUTY governor William Mackay escorted the Press around the ruins of Northeye Prison on Thursday morning.

He said: "I feel very disappointed but at the same time in this job you have to put aside any emotions.

"In my opinion it was pure vandalism. There was no reason for it because the inmates enjoyed a reasonable standard of living here.

"One of the tragedies is that society outside is so violent anyway that the inmates carry on the same in prison as outside."

As we passed the damaged probation service, Mr Mackay said the senior probation officer could not understand why her office had been attacked.

"They are there to help the inmates out," he added. He said it was the worst prison riot in this country since rioting at Wormwood Scrubs, Gartree and Hull in the 1970s.

THE father of a Northeye inmate travelled down from London on Thursday morning to find out whether his son was safe.

Leslie James Steel, 22, is serving a 21-month sentence for a drink/driving offence. His father, Ronald, from Islington, London, heard of the riot on television on Wednesday evening. He immediately rang Northeye and was told officers had no idea at that stage who was in the prison and who had come out.

Dad's fear for son

When he failed to get any more information by telephone on Thursday morning he drove down to Bexhill, and was told that no inmates

had been injured. His son's whereabouts, however, were not known.

Mr Steel said: "My son wouldn't have been

involved in the riots. He was only in for a drink/driving offence.

"He shouldn't have been put in with these violent prisoners."

Background to prison dispute

THE NORTHEYE riot came as the Prison Officers' Association nationally imposed a ban on overtime as part of its dispute with the Home Office prison department.

The ban came into effect at noon on the day of the riot and the POA said it would last until Tuesday.

During Wednesday the union's national vice-chairman Mr Alan Taylor warned of tougher moves to come unless the Home Office agrees to union demands.

Union man talks tough

The union's 18,000 members voted to support industrial action if necessary. One of their

grievances is Government moves to cut overtime.

The POA says understaffed prisons such as Northeye could not continue without overtime.

Only hours before the Northeye riot, Home Secretary Douglas Hurd had assured the Commons that the Government would take all possible steps to sustain the rights of Governors to manage their prisons and to protect prisoners and the public from the consequences of POA action.

NORTHEYE — wives speak out

Bleak future for officers' families

WIVES of prison officers have praised their husbands' actions and both firemen and policemen.

But they are bitter with national press reports saying the riot started because the officers wanted more money — which they say is totally untrue.

Most of the officers worked continuously for well over 30 hours, they say, without even breaks for food. Both inmates and police received meal breaks. The police also regularly changed duties.

The wives, who cannot be named because their husbands have signed the Official Secrets Act, spoke to the Observer to defend their husbands.

One said: "Someone has got to stand up for

them." Many of them had not on Thursday seen their husbands or had only a brief visit since before the riot.

Families maintained a constant stream of tea night and day, and sent in snacks when possible. Many of the officers worked late into Thursday night escorting inmates to other prisons.

The future for these families looks bleak. Deputy governor William Mackay said a skeleton staff would be maintained at Northeye. He was unable to say when the prison is likely to be operational again, or what would happen to the rest of the officers.

Many of the wives fear they will be posted to other prisons. They are also worried about their homes.

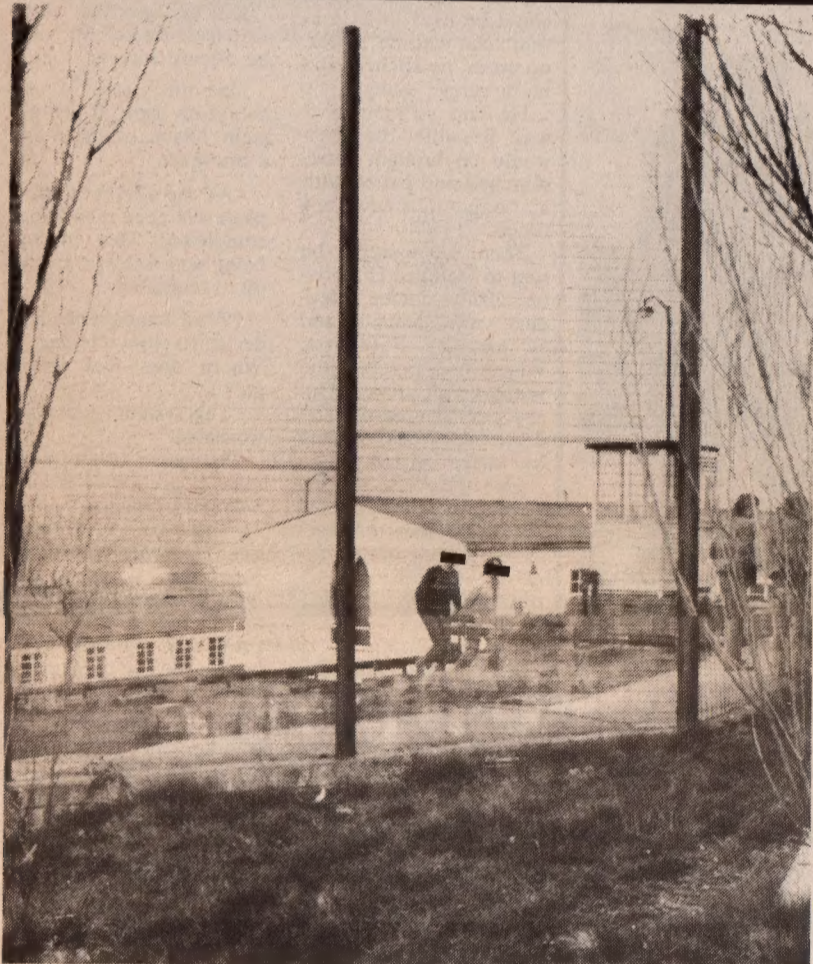
One woman said her husband has been a prison officer for 17 years. He was recently

injured in the face, and received a flat rate of pay to keep his family on of £95 a week. But she stressed the POA's action was not over money, but about overtime and manning levels. She said many of the officers worked a 15-hour day, and that they have only done what the Government wants to do by cutting their overtime.

All said their husbands did not believe in striking.

Some felt bitter over the facilities available to inmates, while their husbands worked long, unsocial hours. One woman said she had to buy her children's school books, whilst inmates were given books at the educational centre.

Another said that medical officers were called out at all times of the day and night to treat inmates without the need for an appointment.



• The prison chapel, seen in the foreground in this shot taken early in the riot, survived major damage despite buildings near it being gutted by fire.



• Prisoners gather near the fence

Bottles could have killed...

PEOPLE in the immediate vicinity of the riot on Wednesday night were counting their blessings on Thursday morning.

The morning's search of the charred and devastated ruins by the fire brigade revealed a number of oxy-acetylene bottles which failed to ignite.

According to deputy governor William Mackay, a fire brigade spokesman said if the bottles in the heavy engineering workshop had gone up they would have sent sheets of flame three hundred yards.

It would have blitzed not only prison officers' married quarters, but those outside the perimeter fence, including police, onlookers and reporters and photographers.

Prisoners inside the fence would have stood no chance.

The blast from the explosion would have eclipsed those that had already rent the night sky and sent sheets of flame as high as 70 feet into the air.

Pavilion offer

PERMISSION was sought and given for the De La Warr Pavilion to be used as a temporary holding station for prisoners on Wednesday night — but in the event it was not needed.

Chairman of Rother Council's tourism committee, Councillor Ivor Brampton said he had "no hesitation" in giving consent.

He said: "I felt it was the local authority's duty to do all they could to help relieve the pressure on the police and prison service, who did a marvellous job to contain the situation."

Cllr Brampton, a member of the Board of Visitors at Northeye, said the approach was made to tourism director David Blake at about 11.00 pm, and Mr Blake contacted Cllr Brampton.

"If I thought for one moment that there was any danger of the pavilion being damaged, I wouldn't have given permission."

"But I was given assurances that it would have been the more moderate prisoners who would have been housed in there, the ones that gave themselves up early on."

Around 200 prisoners could have been held in the main hall of the pavilion, and Cllr Brampton feels they would have been quite secure.

"I think the type of prisoner that would have been put in there would be the type who would be content to sit and wait out events," he said.

In the event the prisoners were catered for in drill halls in Bexhill and Hastings, and in police cells.



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NORTHEYE — wreck of a prison

Chief who faced an armed mob



HERO of the hour was Northeye's chief officer, Ken Cousins. Governor Danny Ozanne said at the height of the blaze: "He should get a medal for what he did tonight."

Mr Cousins, pictured, was in charge when first signs of the riot began.

Prisoners armed themselves with knives and meat cleavers, scalpels from the hospital and broom handles.

They besieged Mr Cousins and his handful of officers.

Faced with the problem of controlling a howling, chanting mob of stone-throwing prisoners from out of the prison's population of 447, Mr Cousins followed policy and ordered a tactical withdrawal to the gate.

Mr Ozanne was called from his home and Mr Cousins accompanied him back into the riot-torn jail.

Mr Ozanne said: "We tried to get to the 'hot line' to the Home Office in my room."

"The line was dead. The office came under a hail of stones and we had to withdraw."

"Ken was marvellous. I am putting him forward for a commendation at the least."



• The beginning — fires are started.



• Left — a trolley burns. Above — the EME workshop.

NORTHEYE — seven days on. For the story of the aftermath and views on the prison's future, read next week's Bexhill Observer.

From page 3.

Dawn, and in thick fog a mobile food unit arrived from London to feed the prisoners in the drill halls.

At about 7 am the Governor and prison officers armed with riot shields entered the prison, but met no resistance from the remaining prisoners. Thirty-two prisoners gave themselves up by 8 am and four were rounded up.

The clothing store and an administration block attached to the visiting section were still burning. Other administration blocks were wrecked, prisoners' files destroyed, and an attempt had been made to force the safe. Capsules and syringes littered the ground, and water was gushing from a damaged tank.

Mr Ozanne said there was no way the prison could be used in its present state with no power, no water, no kitchens and no sewerage system.

He said as soon as it was possible the men would be brought back, searched and issued with a "bag of necessary things".

Then 200 were to be sent to Stanford Hill prison, 200 to junior offenders establishments, and 12 each to Parkhurst, Wormwood Scrubs, and Wandsworth prisons. But any men wanted by CID detectives would remain for further questioning.

One theory is that the attack was premeditated as the communications system with both the telephone and officers' control point for two way-radio knocked out early on. Some officers spoke of an atmosphere building up during the afternoon. The trouble started in the

Dawn rose on the wreck of a prison

canteen, usually closed at 6 pm, but an officer was in stock-taking. Prisoners armed with staves and hooded threatened him.

Deputy governor, William Mackay said about 10 per cent of the inmates were thought to be the hard-core trouble-makers.

Prison families now fear their way of life will be altered forever.

One officer said: "I am five years short of retirement. I have just taken on a mortgage."

"At the very best this place will need rebuilding completely. That means being sent away probably on secondment."

"What happens if they decide to close the place? Where does that leave me?"

"This system never was workable."

The most unpopular man at present is Home Secretary Douglas Hurd, blamed by officers for not heeding warnings from Northeye and blamed for what is seen by the union as his intransigence by provoking the overtime ban and so giving the prisoners the opportunity to riot.

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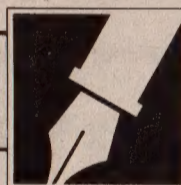


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Yours sincerely,

Jan Gladstone

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